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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION REJECTS NEW PM, PLANS PARALLEL GOVERNMENT

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B) 09 ANTANANARIVO 870,
C) 09 ANTANANARIVO 858

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Andry "TGV" Rajoelina has removed all of the opposition leaders from positions held under the failed Maputo process, and named a retired army colonel, Albert Camille Vital, as his new prime minister. The opposition movements announced they would continue implementing the Maputo Charter of the Transition without Rajoelina, essentially by forming a parallel government. Plans to "intensify" protests in Antananarivo have not yet resulted in any action, and it appeared on December 21 that Rajoelina and his new PM may attempt to arrest opposition leaders before renewed street protests gain any momentum. While most Malagasy desperately hope that calm will prevail over the holiday season, Rajoelina's call for a "holiday truce" appears ever less likely to succeed. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Shortly after permitting the Maputo III participants to return to Madagascar on December 18 (reftel C), Rajoelina issued a decree (2009/1385) abrogating the nomination of consensus Prime Minister Euguene Mangalaza, effective immediately. He then nominated Vice Prime Minister for the Interior Cecile Manorohanta as interim Prime Minister, effectively delivering on his mid-week statements indicating that he would no longer cooperate with Madagascar's other political movements.

¶3. (SBU) Opposition leaders were quick to respond, with a press conference of their own at 20:00 that same night. Former President Albert Zafy, along with Transition Co-President Fetison Rakoto Andrianirina and President of the Congress Mamy Rakotoarivelo (both representing Former President Marc Ravalomanana), reaffirmed their support for Mangalaza, and denounced Rajoelina's statements from his December 16 televised speech. They opposed his plan to unilaterally organize elections in March 2010, and stated that they would instead continue implementing the Transition Charter, as agreed in Maputo and Addis Ababa from August to November. Zafy called on the military to remain neutral and stay in their barracks, to avoid conflict as the three movements sought to "install" their new government in the coming days.

¶4. (SBU) On December 18, Rajoelina also released an ordinance (2009/12) abrogating the Charter of the Transition (from Maputo) and the Additional Act (from Addis Ababa), thus rendering (in his view) the positions of Co-President, President of the Congress, and President of the National Reconciliation Council "null and void", despite opposition claims to the contrary. He also indicated that there may be legal consequences for the December 18 press conference; on December 21, it was widely reported that Mamy Rakotoarivelo had been called into court for questioning, and rumors of arrest warrants for several opposition leaders began circulation again.

¶5. (SBU) On December 20, Rajoelina named Colonel Albert Camille Vital as Prime Minister. Vital is relatively unknown, and claims to have not met Rajoelina prior to December 20. As a member of the

Vezo ethnic group, from Tulear, he may satisfy those in the south-west who were incensed over the October sacking of PM Roindefo Monja (also from Tulear), but his appointment has little other immediate benefit. Vital holds a degree in civil engineering from the USSR, and twice studied in French military schools, in 1991 and 2001. His highest military assignment was as Chef de Corps of the First Regiment Fifth Military in Tulear from 1998 to 2001. He left the military in 2007 to launch a private security company in Tulear, and has been President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Tulear since 2008. He has ties to both the Ratsiraka and Rajoelina political factions, but has little experience in politics. Vital is rumored to have been Rajoelina's third choice, after Rear Admiral Hyppolite Ramaroson and General Ismael Mounibou.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Consensus Prime Minister Mangalaza has thus far refused to step down, stating that he is the "prime minister accepted by the international community" - although that claim is unlikely to help his cause among Rajoelina's movement. Opposition leaders have announced plans to intensify their rallies at Magro (on the north side of the city) to protest Rajoelina's recent moves, and leaders at today's rally reportedly announced plans to "install" 156 members of the transition congress on December 22 at the building of the former National Assembly in Tsimbazaza, in Antananarivo. The next 24 hours will provide either an opportunity for the opposition to show its support, or for Rajoelina to steamroller their plans in the name of a one-sided "holiday truce". END COMMENT.

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